



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Attacks on Protestant church property in the Irish Republic continues



The partially renovated Free Presbyterian hall, at Annyart.

Last month we reported the arson attack on Coragarry Free Presbyterian Church in Co. Monaghan. Although the insurance company's estimate of the cost of repairing the fire damaged building is put at 100,000, the Republic of Ireland's authorities insist that it was but an attack by vandals! A further attack took place on Free Presbyterian Church property at the weekend of September 18th, when Annyart Hall near Castleblaney in Co. Monaghan, recently purchased and

partially renovated by Tullyvallen Free Presbyterian Church in south Armagh, had many of its windows broken despite the use of toughened glass, in a sustained stoning attack. The hall was to be used as a gospel outreach centre by the congregation in the east Monaghan area. It seems that the government in the Irish Republic, despite the decline of the Protestant population from some 10% to less than 2% since the formation of the state in 1920, is unwilling to recognise the sectarianism that is alive and well in its domain. It has been very quick to point the finger at any discrimination or sectarianism, real or imagined, taking place in Northern Ireland over the years. It is time for it now to show the same zeal in tackling this evil in its own backyard.



Cavan Baptist Church, constantly attacked.

The property of other denominations has also suffered. Cavan Baptist congregation suffers incessant attacks even though it has repeatedly repudiated the label "Protestant", saying that it is neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic - it is "Baptist". They are reported as having ceased to lodge insurance claims.

Other incidents of intimidation, such as the burning of a Protestant farmer's hay bales near Belturbet, Co. Cavan, are ongoing and not always reported.

Delegation

The Moderator of the Presbytery of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, Dr. Ian Paisley, is to lead a delegation of representatives from the two congregations affected by these attacks to see the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, Mr. Bertie Ahern. Rev. Gordon Dane, minister of Coragarry congregation and minister in charge of the vacant congregation in Tullyvallen, will head the local representatives who consist of elders and deacons from both congregations.

A recent letter in The Impartial Reporter, a Fermanagh-based weekly newspaper, highlights the problems for Protestants in a Roman Catholic-dominated state. The letter was from Rev. Alan Synnott, Rector of St Mary's Parish Church in Drummully, Co. Monaghan and appeared in the 2nd September edition of the newspaper. There has been a history of attacks upon the Drummully church property, dating back to some two years ago, when



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Drummully church and some other Protestant churches in the area were attacked by arsonists. A member of the select vestry of the parish told The Impartial Reporter that "over the years we have lost quite a few families; it is true to say that numbers are dwindling. We are very much in the minority in this area and attacks such as this are seen as an attack on the whole Protestant community. It is worrying, coming after the attack on the Free Presbyterian church (the burning of Coragarry church), it leads us to think that we're not going to be left alone."

We reproduce Rev. Synnott's letter, highlighting some sentences for emphasis.

"Dear Sir, - I write to you on my own behalf and on behalf of the parishioners of the small county Monaghan congregation of St. Mary's Parish Church, Drummully. We are a Church of Ireland congregation located on the Cavan-Clones concession road and for many years we have suffered ongoing persecution and intimidation. Around midnight of Tuesday, 24th August, 1999, I received a telephone call from a parishioner to say that our church hall was on fire again. Someone had placed a petrol soaked tyre against the hall door and ignited it resulting in the destruction of the door. We know that the vast majority of people in the neighbourhood are appalled at this attack and indeed it was a member of the Catholic community who reported it to us. We are grateful to the Clones fire brigade and the Garda Siochana for their prompt and helpful response. Above all we give thanks to Almighty God that no one was hurt and the damage was minimal.

The fact remains, however, that there are those within the majority community on the border who hate us and want to see us cleared out of the area . Bear in mind that this is a church building, it has no political or strategic significance and is there for the use of our parishioners. We have a very successful table-tennis club based in the hall and it is used to offer hospitality at funerals and for occasional social events.

The attack last Tuesday night was vandalism that was motivated by sectarianism and a hatred of those of us who express our Christian faith according to the reformed tradition. Whether or not we have a ceasefire is a matter for the politicians, the fact is we have no peace. If you worship God in St. Mary's Parish Church, Drummully you may experience the peace of God which passes all human understanding but you will not have peace of mind as you go about your daily life in the border community. You will know that someone local has tried three times in four years to burn your church hall, you will know that there will probably be a ball-bearing shot through the church window by some passing thug, and you will also know that the perpetrator lives close by.

All this taken against the backdrop of a parish which has seen families terrorised into leaving by the IRA through the Troubles and who have seen our original church hall burnt down in the Eighties. Given that our children daily face the cauldron of sectarian abuse on the school buses and it is a lonely isolated place to live, one would think we are downcast. Not so, we are keenly aware that we are not alone and that we proclaim a living and vibrant faith, that Jesus Christ is our Lord and we will worship Him and proclaim His Name in all the world. If our buildings go, we will worship in a field or by the roadside and our persecutors will not succeed.



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As we seek to love God with all our heart, mind and soul we will seek to love our neighbour as ourselves. We will even pray for the poor lost soul who thought that a match and petrol could quench the Gospel of Jesus Christ and make us go away, the gates of hell will never prevail against the church of Christ and that's a promise.

Yours in the Name of Christ the King

ALAN SYNNOTT (Rector),

The Rectory, Newtownbutler."

We have to salute Mr. Synnott for writing such a letter. It reveals a world of which many in Northern Ireland are unaware, never mind our fellow citizens across the Irish Sea in Great Britain! It takes courage to complain openly of such attacks. Protestants have learned that complaining does not bring a visit from Amnesty International or the local representatives of The UN Human Rights Commission, let alone an Inquiry headed by some ex-colonial Governor! No! Complaining, Protestants have learned, leads only to another visit from your tormentors and an intensifying of the trouble. Consequently, where Protestants are in the minority, they tend to keep their heads down.

Such a tactic can hardly be less successful than the campaigns of complaining to our government in London via the democratic process against the terrorism of the IRA that has been conducted for the last thirty years. The reponse of our government was to remove, first of all, the Ulster Special Constabulary, then the Ulster Defence Regiment and now all that is left is the RUC and that too must go, say Mr. Patten and Mo Mowlam. As well as that, complaining has brought upon us an evil and deceitful campaign of pressure to accept IRA terrorists into government over us here in Northern Ireland. So complaining has not proved a very successful tactic at all.

We can but hope that Mr. Blair and Mr. Ahern do not seek to appoint the arsonists who burned Coragarry and Drummully churches as elders or church wardens in the respective congregations they have thus persecuted. After all, it would not be more offensive or outrageously wicked than what the two aforementioned political rogues are seeking to do through the Peace Agreement!